

Morocco hopes to make a splash in the beach vacations market

> By: Ian Stalker

Morocco is in the midst of a decade long-project that it hopes will lead to its hosting 10 million foreign tourists in 2010. Last year it saw 5.9 million visitors.



The Mediterranean coast

شاطئ المتوسط

The Vision 2010 project includes capitalizing on the country's 3,500 kilometres of Mediterranean and Atlantic coast, with only a fraction of that coast having yet been developed to accommodate tourists seeking vacations by the ocean, says Rachid Maaninou, the Moroccan National Tourism Office's director of international markets. The country wants to triple the number of hotel beds – giving it some 230,000 – suitable for foreign tourists by 2010, with six planned resort communities slated to open in the next few years along Morocco's coast.

"We have 3,500 kilometres of coast and we're only using six kilometres in Agadir," Maaninou says.

But 2007 will see the first of the planned resorts – Saidia – begin hosting visitors when its first hotel the Barcelo opens. It will be followed by a 500-room Iberostar. Saidia will also have a marina and golf, and will have a distinctively Moroccan look, as will the other upcoming resorts.

Those resorts will better enable Morocco to cater to the large number of Europeans who seek Mediterranean sun vacations, but

Maaninou says his homeland will never be seen as a beach destination alone. Instead, tourism authorities want people to view Morocco as a place where tourists can both hit beaches and explore such historical cities as Fez and Marrakech.

Maaninou says that Fez is also a must-see for tourists, with that ancient city having many attractions. "When you're walking in the medina of Fez, you're walking past walls that were built in the eighth century."

Many old houses in Fez have been converted into museums, he adds. ■